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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how undergraduate instruction in reading methods can be structured to prepare elementary education majors for competency-based teacher certification. Examples of how content, methods, and materials can be adapted to give students opportunities to perform specified tasks and to demonstrate their competencies are suggested. Some of the suggestions include using a short simple format to develop modules and simplifying the wording in the development of modules. Also included are a "Module Starter," which provides a standard format for developing a module; a conversation between two college professors about its use; and an opening page of the starter showing how it was modified to meet the needs of the professors. (WR)

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TAKING BELLY-ACHING OUT OF MODULE-MAKING

Recently educators have become "bewitched, bothered, and bewildered" by the competency based movement with its instructional modules. The claims for competency based programs are certainly bewitching. Their modular approach is supposed to help teachers become as competent in the classroom as obstetricians are in the delivery room. That's a bewitching prospect. But many an educator has become bothered and bewildered while trying to move toward that prospect.

Much of the bother and bewilderment is generated by the favorite instructional vehicle of the competency based movement -- the module. A module is an instructional package that leads to competency. It has some characteristics in common with a map. It points out the learner's

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destination (objective) and some good routes for getting there (learning activities). It also gives the student landmarks for judging whether or not he has arrived (pretest and posttest).

Well-designed modules give structure and substance to a competency based program. Upon completion of the modules leading to certification as a reading teacher, a candidate would be able to demonstrate these competencies:

He knows his subject, reading.	(Knowledge)
He can teach reading.	(Performance)
His pupils learn to read.	(Results)

It isn't easy to design modules that establish a student's competencies in the areas of knowledge, performance, and results. But many education professors are making valiant attempts to design such modules. In about half of our states, education courses are being restructured to fit competency based programs. Consequently, many man-hours are going into module-making.

THE NEED FOR SIMPLICITY

Perhaps some of those hours could be saved if module-makers could start with a short simple format in hand. Much of the belly-aching associated with module-making happens right at the onset of the job when the module-maker tries to arrive at a format. Various formats include all these different elements:

Prospectus	Preassessment	Criterion behaviors
Introduction	Overview	Learning experiences
Rationale	Instructional alternatives	Evaluation
Objectives	Flow chart	Recycles
Prerequisites	Professional entry level	Postassessment
Competencies	Enablers	Conclusion

This listing is the type of thing that inspired Mason (4) to satirize modules. Obviously, any module that included all eighteen

of the preceding elements would be too cumbersome for practical use. Sartain (5), Howsam (3), Houston (2) and Arends (1) have suggested module formats that contain the essentials within five to seven parts. They, along with other proponents of competency based education, express the desirability of streamlining module format.

FORMAT AND WORDING

The three parts that appear with greatest regularity in modules are (1) the objective, (2) the learning activities, and (3) the assessments (pretest and posttest).

Those three parts seem to be the "musts" of a module. The objective can't be eliminated since it names the goal and thereby determines the content. The pretest and posttest can't be eliminated since they determine whether or not the goal has been reached. The learning activities certainly can't be eliminated since they enable the student to establish his competencies in the areas of knowledge, performance, and/or results. So the simplest possible format for a module has to include the objective, pretest and posttest, and learning activities.

Simplifying the format, however, is only the first step in taking the belly-aching out of module-making. This module skeleton must be fleshed out with sentences and paragraphs. The module-maker faces the formidable task of wording his thoughts to fit the format. It's always difficult to communicate by putting sentences on paper. But it's doubly difficult when the words objective, pretest, posttest, and learning activities must leap out meaningfully from the material.

One frustrated module-writer commented, "I wish the competency

based experts would take a lesson from bill-collection agencies. Those agencies have developed standard wordings for their letters. The first letter uses very polite language to tell you your bill is overdue. Then the wording in each succeeding letter gets stronger. But the agent doesn't have to waste his time composing these letters. All he has to do is fill in the blanks with your name and the amount you owe. I wish the competency based experts would work out some standard wording and give me a fill-in-the-blanks form for a module-starter."

If our society can produce fill-in-the-blanks forms for everything from recommendations to love letters, perhaps the idea of a fill-in-the-blanks module starter isn't too farfetched. It would be no more than an expanded outline. It could serve only as the roughest of rough drafts. Still it might save module-makers a little time at the onset of the job. It might provide wording for a few of the opening sentences that are so hard to get down on paper.

THE MODULE STARTER

So, in the interest of hastening progress toward competency based teacher education, I worked out the MODULE STARTER which appears on the following page. You can fill in the blanks with almost any topic. You can use the standard wording of the opening paragraphs to show that your format includes objectives, pretest and posttest, and learning activities. You can, in effect, sprint for the first 100 yards of your cross-country run in module-making.

The MODULE STARTER, however, carries you over only the first 100 yards. For the rest of the module-making job, you are running on

your own power.

Later in this article you will see how the MODULE STARTER can be used to speed up the production of a working draft. You will also see what a working draft looks like, after it has been derived from the following MODULE STARTER.

MODULE STARTER

Topic: _____

Objective: After the learning activities on _____, you will be able to answer yes to each question below, and back up each yes with the required performance.

Ask yourself these questions now as your pretest. Use them again as your posttest when you finish the module. The sentences after each question will give you an overview of the learning activities in this module.

KNOWLEDGE QUESTION(S)

Can you expand your concept of _____? To find out, try Learning Activity #1. Your first step in this activity will be to write a paragraph on _____ that reflects your point of view right now. Your last step will be write a paragraph on _____ that reflects your point of view upon completion of this module.

As you add other "knowledge" questions that deal with important parts of your module topic, you might use this wording:

Can you (name, list, match, identify, define, describe) _____? If not, try Learning Activity # ___. During this activity you will. . .

PERFORMANCE QUESTION(S)

Can you design and teach a lesson on _____? For guidelines, see Learning Activity # ___. In this activity you will _____ (tape record or videotape your presentation, interview people about your topic and present information informally, roleplay your lesson with peers, work with a class of children, etc.).

RESULTS QUESTION(S)

Can you give evidence that your pupil(s) learned what you taught about _____? For guidelines see Learning Activity # ___. During this activity you will _____ (write a notebook report on what your pupils did, submit children's tests and scores, do a self evaluation by checksheet, get a peer evaluation by rating scale, etc.)

A WAY TO SAVE TIME

The following conversation shows how two professors approached the MODULE STARTER. One thought it could save him some time, so he wanted to use it. The other was reluctant, but finally agreed to give it a try.

You will see that they settled for just filling in the blanks only at the very beginning of their module-making. Soon they started changing the wording, expanding some parts, deleting others, and adapting the material to fit their topic and their program. This is the way the STARTER should be used. It is a launching pad, not a mold.

The opening page of the module finally produced by these two professors adheres fairly closely to the format of the MODULE STARTER. However, they changed the wording in many places, and they added material on their particular topic. The STARTER served mainly as a taking-off point for the two professors whose conversation is transcribed here:

He: We've been assigned to teamteach the reading methods course in the competency based program. So we'll be writing modules together. Where do you want to start?

She: I don't want to start at all. I have a terrible time getting started on a module. It takes forever! By the time I've struggled through an introduction and a rationale and a list of prerequisites, I have writer's cramp.

He: Why be bothered with all those parts? Let's try the MODULE STARTER for a shortcut. It might help us get a format and a few sentences on paper in a hurry.

She: Oh, no! None of that quick and dirty stuff for me. I'm a Ph.D., not a grade-school dropout. I don't need a simplified format and standard wording. I'm scholarly. .

He: Well, I'm rushed. So let's see if the MODULE STARTER can save us some writing time.

She: Have it your way. But it won't work. There's no way to get off to a fast start on a module.

He: We'll see. What's the first thing you want our students to be able to do in this reading methods course? What's your first objective?

She: To start with, I want them to be able to describe the reading process.

He: Okay, let's fill in the blank in the objective with that topic, the reading process.

> Objective: After the learning activities on the reading process, you will be able to answer yes to each question below and back up each yes with the required performance.

She: That's too simple. It doesn't sound scholarly. To meet that objective, all you have to do is answer yes to the pretest and posttest questions.

He: But you have to back up each answer with the required performance. We'll word the pretest and posttest questions very carefully. We'll fix it so that the students can't answer yes to those questions without establishing their competencies.

She: Okay, I'll live with that objective for now. Let's move on to the pretest.

He: If we fill in the blanks for the first "knowledge" question, this is what we'll have:

> Can you expand your concept of the reading process? To find out, try Learning Activity #1. Your first step in this activity will be to write a paragraph on the reading process that reflects your point of view right now. Your last step will be to write a paragraph on the reading process that reflects your point of view upon completion of this module.

She: Let's change that wording a little. Let's say write a description of instead of write a paragraph on.

He: Good idea! The MODULE STARTER says that we should add other knowledge questions. How can we word those questions to get at more than one description of reading? We want our students to view reading as a decoding process and as a visual process and as a thinking process.

She: Let's have those three points of view in three questions for our pretest and posttest.

He: All right. I'll try to get them down on paper. (After a minute he hands over this draft.)

> Can you describe how you decode words that are unfamiliar to you? If not, try Learning Activity 2, "Reading as a Decoding Process."
>
> Can you describe how your eyes operate while you're reading? If not, try Learning Activity 3, "Reading as a Visual Process."
>
> Can you describe how you recognize, comprehend, and interpret printed material? If not, try Learning Activity 4, "Reading as a Thinking Process."

She: Not bad. You work on a learning activity to go with each of those questions. I'll fill in the blank in the performance question and then start revising it. . .

Within the hour these two professors completed the opening page of their module on the reading process. It is shown on the next page. As you can see, they adapted the MODULE STARTER to suit their topic. Their expanded opener is detailed enough to serve as an overview of the whole module, but it is still short enough to fit on one page.

Their opening page gives only one learning activity for each question. This approach is adequate for module-makers who are trying to produce a working draft in a hurry. Alternate routes to each goal are certainly desirable, but they can be added later.

The following type of page, derived from the MODULE STARTER, is easy to produce and understand. After a student reads the sentences following the knowledge questions (#1-4), the performance question (#5), and the results question (#6), he knows how he can fulfill the objectives of this module.

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MODULE STARTER

Topic: THE READING PROCESS

Objective: After the learning activities on the reading process you will be able to answer yes to each question below and back up each yes with the required performance.

Ask yourself these questions now as your pretest. Use them again as your posttest when you finish the module. The sentences after each question will give you an overview of the learning activities in this module.

KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

1. Can you expand your concept of the reading process? To find out, try Learning Activity 1, "The Big Picture." Your first step in this activity will be to write a description of the reading process that reflects your point of view right now. Your last step will be to write a description of the reading process that reflects your point of view upon completion of this module.

2. Can you describe how you decode words that are unfamiliar to you? If not, try Learning Activity 2, "Reading as a Decoding Process." During this activity you will try to read a paragraph with your book turned upside down. This decoding experience will help you rediscover so many of the difficulties of beginning readers.

3. Can you describe how your eyes operate while you're reading? If not, try Learning Activity 3, "Reading as a Visual Process." During this activity you will watch the eye movements of a reader so that you can spot fixations, saccadic movements, and return sweeps.

4. Can you describe how you recognize, comprehend, and interpret printed material? If not, try Learning Activity 4, "Reading as a Thinking Process." During this experience you'll study an article about the nature of reading.

PERFORMANCE QUESTION

5. Can you explain the decoding, visual, and/or thinking aspects of the reading process to two adults and two children? For guidelines, see Learning Activity 5, "Interviews with Readers." During this activity you will teach each interviewee three ways to look at the reading process.

RESULT QUESTION

6. Can you give evidence that one of your interviewees retained what you said about the reading process? For guidelines, see Learning Activity 6, "The Proof of the Pudding." During this activity you will check back with one of your interviewees from Activity 5. If, after a lapse of a day or more, that person can describe two of the three points of view about reading that you presented, you can write up a report of successful results.

THE MODULE-MAKERS' THEMESONG

Now that you have seen (1) the MODULE STARTER, (2) a conversation about its use, and (3) an opening page derived from it, you are in a good position to decide whether it can take any of the belly-aching out of module-making. If it can, the belly-achers may change their tune -- or at least their lyrics.

These lyrics, set to the tune of "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered", express the feelings of the ex-belly-achers who have become competency-based converts:

We're modularized
and we're self-paced.
Each field experience is
performance-based.
We're not
bothered and bewildered
by competency.

Do we assess?
Oh, yes, yes, yes.
We preassess and postassess
and reassess.
Bewitched
by our students' competencies
are we.

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